



**F**ish taste great and are good for you, too! Fish can be a healthy, low-fat source of protein, minerals, and vitamins. In fact, experts say that you should eat at least two meals of fish each week. And it is great to catch fish for you and your family to eat!

Fishing is a fun and relaxing outdoor activity that you can enjoy with your family and friends. Getting started can be as easy as picking up a cane pole and heading to your local pond or stream. But whether you are fishing to enjoy the outdoors, to spend time with family, or to catch dinner, you should always be safe.

So, be careful! Some fish caught in South Carolina may not be safe to eat because they contain high levels of mercury. This does not mean that you have to stop eating fish. But if you eat more than two meals of fish that contain mercury each week for a long time, you could develop health problems. This brochure explains why some fish contain mercury and how you can stay safe when you eat them.

## What is mercury?

Mercury is an element that is found naturally in the environment. Burning coal and other fossil fuels adds the most mercury to the environment. But things like factories and even the burning of trash can increase the mercury in the environment, too.

Mercury in the air is brought back to the earth by rain, snow, and sleet and ends up in our lakes and rivers. Mercury gets into fish through the plants and animals that they eat. Older and larger fish have eaten more and been in the water longer, so there will be more mercury in their bodies.

## Can mercury make me sick?

Your body naturally removes small amounts of mercury. But, if there is too much mercury, your body cannot get rid of it. Extra mercury builds up and causes health problems. Too much mercury can harm your nervous system. Babies and children are more at risk since their brains and nerves are still forming.

Mercury in a mother's body can harm her unborn baby. Brain damage, blindness, seizures and other problems can occur in the baby. Children who take in mercury after they are born can be harmed too. They can have digestive problems, kidney damage and problems with their nervous systems. Health problems due to mercury in

Did you know?

Fish that contain mercury do not look, smell, or taste differently than other fish!

children and unborn babies cannot always be corrected.

In adults, mercury can make your mouth, hands, or feet tingle or feel numb. It can also cause vision or hearing problems. If you have any of these symptoms, please see your doctor. All of these problems in adults can usually be corrected if a person stops eating fish that contain high levels of mercury.

For more information about mercury, please visit: [www.scdhec.gov/mercury](http://www.scdhec.gov/mercury)

## How do I know how much fish is safe to eat?

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has a booklet available with the Fish Consumption Advisories. It tells where you should limit the amount of fish you eat. The advisories will also tell you where it is safe to eat as much fish as you like. Fishing can be fun all over South Carolina, but the advisories will help you if you eat the fish you catch.

For a free copy of the current advisories, call DHEC at 1-888-849-7241 (toll-free). You can also find the advisory information on DHEC's web site, [www.scdhec.gov/fish](http://www.scdhec.gov/fish).





## What can I do to protect myself from mercury in fish?

You cannot remove mercury by any special cleaning or cooking methods. This is because mercury is stored in the meat of the fish and not the fat or skin.

You can reduce the health risks from eating fish by doing these things:



Eat smaller fish and smaller amounts of fish.



Do not eat more fish than the Fish Consumption Advisory booklet recommends.



Eat fish from lakes and rivers that do not have advisories.



Enjoy fishing by catching then releasing the fish instead of eating them.

## What about fish from stores and restaurants?

The FDA regulates all fish sold at grocery stores and restaurants. For more information visit their website at: [www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html)



## For more information on South Carolina Fish Consumption Advisories, contact

### SCDHEC

2600 Bull Street  
Columbia, SC 29201  
1-888-849-7241 (toll-free)  
[www.scdhec.gov/fish](http://www.scdhec.gov/fish)

## For more information on fishing, contact

### SCDNR

PO Box 167  
Columbia, SC 29202  
(803) 734-3886  
1-800-ASK-FISH (toll-free fishing hotline)  
[www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov)

Youth can visit [www.screelkids.com](http://www.screelkids.com) for information on a free fishing program to earn rewards.

Fishing is a wonderful way to reconnect with your family and spend time outdoors together. Don't forget to check the rules and regulations for your area before you go!

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## Facts about mercury in fish